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In Honor of Jürgen Spranger at 65

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Jürgen Spranger (Fig. 1) has remained a young man at 65 through several admirable attributes. The first of these is a closeness to the land of his youth near the hills of his beloved Schwarzwald, a place where it is indeed possible to be recreated in body and in soul—a gift he has always shared with his family and a few privileged friends. All who know him will immediately appreciate his second outstanding living skill, namely an ability to play, whether that is with ideas, as in the concept of the "families" of skeletal dysplasia, or at soccer, golf, or tennis ball, or in winning a hand of skat or 500. His infectious enthusiasm is probably a consequence of the latter attribute and is a major reason for the success of the scientifically highly-productive research center he has directed for over 20 years. Openness to ideas and cultures of various parts of the world must also be mentioned. Jürgen Spranger is a totally cosmopolitan person, equally at home in the New World, Australia, all parts of Europe, cities, the countryside of southern France, and the hills of Montana. His ability to speak French and his exceptional skill with the English language have created a network of international contacts, collaborations, and friendships which have greatly enriched his personal and professional life and his friends.

Fig. 1.

Jürgen came by his vocation naturally, being born on the first day of January, 1930, as the son of a highly respected pediatrician in Baden-Baden. He studied medicine in Tübingen, Heidelberg, and Freiburg, receiving his M.D. from the latter university in 1956 with a thesis on obesity and leanness as documented in art, history, and science. Jürgen spent his first stay in the USA during 1957–1958 at the Sloan Kettering Institute for Cancer Research. After 4 years of pediatric training in Heidelberg, he began to work with his mentor, Hans-Rudolf Wiedemann, in Kiel, where his future research directions were largely formed. With Wiedemann, Jürgen notably shared a strong interest in clinical genetics, an avocation fostered by several months of study with von Verschuer in Münster (1963), but also in skeletal radiology, pursued further with E.D.B. Neuhauser in the Department of Radiology at Boston Children's Hospital (1968). Aided by a brilliant intellect, his meteoric rise in German pediatrics was spectacular, having attained a Clinical Professorship in 1972, only 4 years after his habilitation, and an appointment as Professor and Chair of Pediatrics at the University of Mainz in 1974. Academic and administrative duties notwithstanding, Jürgen has a twice-weekly general pediatric clinic, hewing to a historical ideal of the pediatrician responsible for *all* aspects of his field.

Jürgen's international prominence in clinical genetics was attained with equal ease and speed, and by the age of 40 he was widely recognized as an outstanding authority in the mucopolysaccharidoses, mucolipidoses, and genetic skeletal dysplasias. Jürgen was responsible for a number of important original observations, earning him some 80 citations in the 11th edition of McKusick's Catalog (1994), and the Czerny Prize of the German Pediatric Society (DGK) in 1973. Some of these, e.g., campomelic syndrome and geleophysic dysplasia, were the result of a year of collaborative work at the University of Wisconsin, where, according to Jürgen's recollections, this commentator was last known to have dipped his toes in the waters of Lake Mendota during lunchtime. Collaboration with Len Langer and Hans Wiedemann led to the publication of the important *Atlas on Bone Dysplasias* (1974), for many years the standard reference on the subject, and recently under revision. Jürgen was also responsible for the formation, in his department, of a multidisciplinary center for the coordinated ambulatory care of short-stature patients.

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In 1978, Jürgen and Marlies Tolksdorf held the first International Symposium for Clinical Genetics in Pediatrics, presently held every 2 years as a most important forum for scientific contacts between pediatricians and clinical geneticists in Germany and neighboring countries. Ten years later, at Jürgen's initiative, the DGK founded the working group "Klinische Genetik in der Pädiatrie."

This interest is also reflected in Jürgen's activity as Editor-in-Chief (as Wiedemann's successor) of the *European Journal of Pediatrics* (now incorporating the *Acta Paediatrica Belgica, Helvetica Paediatrica Acta,* and *Acta Paediatrica Hungarica*), with its balanced coverage of all of scientific pediatrics, but with frequent publication of important papers in constitutional pediatrics, many of them by his coworkers and students. Every evening and weekend is spent on his editorial work, which he takes very seriously, but which is also a source of great satisfaction to him.

Jürgen's work as chairman of his department or as member of important national pediatric organizations receives little notice abroad, but deserves mention for several reasons. First, with his emphasis on the unity of pediatrics and on the whole child, he has resisted trends at dividing the department into specialty sections that characterize the development of Pediatrics elsewhere, especially in North America. Nevertheless, he has freely encouraged the staff of his department to engage in basic research, and these several groups (including immunology, infectious diseases, neurology, intensive care, and molecular biology) have now taken investigations to a level that compares with the best in the world. Secondly, highly conscious of his responsibility as a teacher, he (together with F.J. Schulte) has been responsible for the highly-regarded recent revisions of the standard pediatric textbook in German, namely, Feer's *Lehrbuch der Kinderheilkunde*. Finally, 6 years ago, Jürgen accepted the position of Speaker of the newly-founded Akademie für Kinderheilkunde and Jugendmedizin (Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine), a position in which he was able, with enormous investment of energy, to reunite the efforts of various German professional organizations dealing with pediatrics, i.e., the DGK, the Association of German Pediatricians, and the German Society for Social Pediatrics. In recognition of these efforts, Jürgen became only the second academic chair to be made honorary member of the aforementioned association. As clinical pediatric geneticists, we were particularly pleased with Jürgen's election in 1992 as honorary member of the American Pediatric Society in recognition of his work in clinical genetics, especially in the skeletal dysplasias. During the summer of 1995 I was privileged to attend the dedication of the beautiful new University Children's Hospital in Mainz, surely a crowning accomplishment in Jürgen's administrative labors.

It is a joy to see Jürgen happy with his lovely and equally cosmopolitan wife Anita, his sons (one a neurologist), a daughter-in-law who is a pediatric geneticist (and contributor to this Festschrift), and a growing attachment to his second home in the United States.

And in honor of his sixty-fifth birthday and his great accomplishments in medical genetics, we are happy to dedicate to our friend and colleague Jürgen Spranger this Festschrift issue of the *American Journal of Medical Genetics*, with contributions by his many friends, colleagues, students, and coworkers as sincere expression of our respect and affection, with our best wishes for health, joy, and continued professional fulfillment.

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